

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

CHRISTOPHER BREWARD and CAROLINE EVANS, Eds., *Fashion and Modernity*. Oxford: Berg. 2005, xv + 213 p.

*Fashion and Modernity* aims to examine the relationship between fashion and the processes of modernization. As duly noted in its introduction by editors Christopher Beward and Caroline Evans, the book wishes to “[scrutinize] the relationship of fashion to technology, industrialization and consumption from the court masques of seventeenth-century London to the forensic laboratories of late-twentieth-century Washington” and “considers how that relationship affects appearances and subjectivities, soliciting questions about the nature of identity, the body, nationality and gender” (3). Moreover, it also aims at a “materialist examination of fashion as both a social and a spatial practice, and also as both image and artefact” (Ibid).

This book is the published result of a collection of papers presented at an earlier symposium, and its format preserves this process, as each of its nine chapters is followed by a brief response paper from an academic with an interest in the topic but not necessarily from the same disciplinary background. It opens with an introduction by the editors discussing the concepts of modernity and modernization, and some of the key ideas and debates on the subject. This is followed by an excellent opening chapter by Elizabeth Wilson, who continues this discussion and ruminates on the nature of the relationship between fashion and modernity. The book itself is divided into three sections: Producing Identities, Performing Bodies and Processes of Modernity. “Producing Identities” examines the ways in which subjectivities are shaped by the fashion industry, both by the producers and consumers of material goods, historical and contemporary. “Performing Bodies” looks at the presentation of modern fashions and identities in the public sphere, specifically the ways in which public performances and emerging public figures, such as actresses and models, contribute to the dissemination of new and modern ideas, identities and consumer culture to the general public. The third section, “Processes of Modernity,” looks at how fashion, both as a material good and the ideas and theories associated with it, has permeated our modern life and everyday practices, from artistic projects to forensic science.

*Fashion and Modernity* is a fascinating read and includes a refreshing multidisciplinary mix of both historical and contemporary analyses of the worlds of fashion, art and design, two underrepresented and neglected fields in sociology. Its chapter-response paper format works well, for some chapters read more as historical narratives than analyses, and the response

papers in most cases help to address this discrepancy with the necessary theoretical and critical reflection. Though the majority of the book's contributors are fashion and cultural historians, and its primary and intended audience the same, key sociological theories on consumerism and modernity, such as Giddens' reflexivity, Durkheim's anomie and Marx's commodity fetishism, are discussed throughout. At the same time, however, the book also suffers from its format, as the editors' preservation of its original symposium layout does not allow for further discussion of the ideas presented in its chapters beyond that of the individual response papers. While the introduction and opening chapter do a good job of laying the thematic and theoretical groundwork for the rest of the book, a concluding or discussant chapter addressing or reflecting in further detail some commonalities between the ideas presented throughout, as well as some possible conclusions, would also be helpful, as the reader is left hanging at the end to make his or her own conclusions. Further, while the book is heavy on topics detailing the intimate relationship between the fashion industry and the capitalism/modernism nexus, it is significantly weaker in the area of identity construction, and the relationship between it and the two aforementioned themes.

Fashion historians and fashion theorists would find this book indispensable in their fields of study. For sociologists and anthropologists however, with the exception of those with interests rooted in culture and identities, the body or fashion and appearance, this book will prove less valuable. Because the sociological orientation of this book is harder to discern on an initial reading, it would also not be recommended for use by students in sociology or anthropology below the upper year or graduate level.

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